



July 12, 2010

Mr. Phil Alpersou
Montgomery County BRAC Coordinator
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Mr. Alpersou,

At a recent BRAC Implementation Committee meeting, it was suggested that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) needs to do more to reduce the traffic congestion in the Bethesda area in preparation for the opening of the Walter Reed National Medical Center. The NIH Transportation Management Plan (TMP) was described as out-of-date. Our employee parking ratio was described as too high, and in need of adjustment to meet the guidance of the National Capital Planning Commission.

I would like to address these concerns by providing some background information about the NIH TMP and NIH accomplishments in transportation management and in the reduction of traffic congestion. The NIH TMP was written and implemented in 1992. The TMP is supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by and among NCPC, the Montgomery County Planning Board, and NIH. NIH has implemented every short term strategy and every long term strategy contained in the TMP; and NIH has met and exceeded all of the TMP goals.

Our Transportation Management Plan has three stated goals; 1) improve the availability of parking spaces on campus for NIH personnel and visitors; 2) mitigate the traffic impacts of further campus development on the roadways serving the NIH campus such that the level of congestion along the roadways serving NIH is made no worse than if such development did not occur; and 3) maintain a "good neighbor" relationship with the surrounding community. Our results are unmistakable: 1) we have conducted biannual traffic counts at all of our access points which demonstrate that we have decreased, by 30 percent or more, the number of NIH-generated vehicles on the roads that surround our campus below the 1992 baseline numbers, even though our population has increased; 2) we have maintained a good neighbor policy by implementing a Community Liaison Council which meets monthly and provides a forum for community concerns to be heard and addressed expeditiously; and 3) the availability of parking on campus is generally satisfactory.

In January 2005, NIH received conditional approval from the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) for its updated master plan. One of the principal conditions of the NCPC approval was a requirement that NIH update its Transportation Management Plan (TMP) with the objective of reducing the Bethesda campus parking ratio from approximately 0.50 parking spaces per employee to 0.33 parking spaces per employee. The Commission's action stemmed from new parking policies that were adopted in NCPC's Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

The NIH Division of Facilities Planning and the NIH Division of Amenities and Transportation Services began immediately developing a strategy to achieve this new goal. After investigating alternatives with our transportation consultant and in consultation with NCPC, NIH decided to try to implement the lower employee parking ratio over time by keeping the employee parking count static, while campus population grows to the master plan approved levels. This method has already resulted in the lowest employee parking ratio we have ever achieved, which is 0.46. If we are able to continue with this trend, we will achieve an employee parking ratio of 0.37 when the campus population reaches its master plan approved level of 22,000. Several measures will be needed to support this goal, and we have begun to implement them. We have developed a new survey tool to measure peak employee parking occupancies and we will conduct these surveys regularly. We are committed to improving the accessibility of our campus for non-automobile modes of travel and are partnering with the Maryland State Highway Administration and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation in providing the land needed for new and improved public pedestrian and bicycle facilities around our campus perimeter. We continue to actively encourage our employees to participate in carpools, vanpools, and Transhare, and our numbers of enrollees in these programs are the highest they have ever been. We continue to use programs such as Alternative Work Schedules, Telecommuting, and Hotelling to further reduce the numbers of employees who travel to the campus each day.

Our biannual TMP monitoring reports document the fact that we have not provided additional employee parking spaces for the past ten years. We have constructed structured parking garages, but only to replace surface parking lots that were located within our perimeter buffer area. Removing the parking lots from the buffer area was a commitment that NIH made in its master plan and to our neighbors who advise our land use decisions through their participation in our Community Liaison Council.


NIH operates on-campus and off-campus shuttle bus service serving over 60,000 riders each month. We provide land free of charge to WMATA for the Metrorail station and the Kiss and Ride lot, and we provide space for regional and local bus service, and dedicated bus stops for other entities including the National Naval Medical Center.

In 2009 the NIH Employee Transportation Services Office received the champion award from the National Association of Commuter Transportation. We are also very proud that NIH has the highest number of employees who bicycle to work of any employer in the National Capital Region, and we are the 4-time reigning champion of the annual Bike to Work Day. Participants in the 2010 Bike to Work Day included NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins.

NIH will continually looking for ways to improve our transportation management program. We are determined to continue to work with our neighbors and with local, state, and regional transportation authorities to improve access to our campus while reducing traffic congestion.

Please share this letter with the members of the BRAC Implementation Committee, and invite them to contact Ms. Susan Hinton, AICP, NIH Master Planner by email at hintons@mail.nih.gov, should they have any questions or recommendations about NIH transportation planning.

Sincerely,



D.G. Wheeland, Director
Office of Research Facilities